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> THE TRANSFORMERS #4

>INFILTRATION

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>>>>>

INFILTRATION:

Having accessed data from a computer stolen by teenage runaway VERITY CARLO, Autobot medic RATCHET believes there are answers to be found within an abandoned DECEPTICON command bunker in Nebraska. Now, Verity, HUNTER O'NION and JIMMY PINK prepare for a hazardous descent, unware that the bunker has been targetted by STARSCREAM...

PHASE ONE CONTINUES...

>>>>>

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RATCHET

RUNABOUT

PROWL

RUNAMUCK

IRONHIDE

STARSCREAM

SUNSTREAKER

THUNDERCRACKER

BUMBLEBEE

BLITZWING

JAZZ

SKYWARP

WHEELJACK

MEGATRON

AKRON, OHIO (THREE YEARS AGO):

GIRL, I FLAT OUT DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH YOU.

WE'VE TRIED FOSTERING, STATE-ASSISTED HOMES, YOUTH SUPPORT GROUPS, AND EVERY TIME—FOR NO GOOD REASON I CAN SEE—YOU UP STICKS AND *RUN*.

SEEMS TO ME, PEOPLE—M'SELF INCLUDED—ARE BENDIN' OVER BACKWARDS TO GIVE YOU A HOME, A *FUTURE*...

...AND YOU JUST THROW IT *BACK* IN THEIR FACES!

SAYS HERE YOU'RE—AN' I QUOTE...

..."UNCOMMONLY BRIGHT... WITH DEEP SOCIALIZATION ISSUES." NOW TO *ME* THAT'S JUST A FANCY WAY OF SAYIN' YOU THINK YOU'RE *BETTER* THAN THE REST OF US ORDINARY, EVERYDAY FOLK.

BOTTOM LINE, YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A *CUT ABOVE*, A REAL *TOUGH* COOKIE. BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I SEE WHEN I LOOK AT YOU?

I SEE A FRIGHTENED LITTLE GIRL...

...IN A *WORLD* OF HURT AND PAIN.

NORTHWEST NEBRASKA (NOW):

VERITY... YOU OKAY?

FINE.

YEAH.

DANDY.

WAS THIS, Y'KNOW, A GOOD IDEA LETTING HER GO DOWN *FIRST?*

LIKE WE HAD A *CHOICE* IN THE MATTER!

STILL, I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. SHE MAKES THIS BIG SHOW OF HOW TOUGH AND INDEPENDENT SHE IS...

"...BUT SOMETIMES I *WONDER.*"

HUNTER, JIMMY– LISTEN UP–I'M *STILL* NOT QUITE SURE HOW YOU TALKED ME INTO THIS, BUT THE FIRST SIGN OF TROUBLE, ABOVE OR BELOW GROUND...

...THIS LITTLE ADVENTURE IS *OVER.* UNDERSTOOD?

BUT–

LISTEN TO *RATCHET,* JIMMY. THE *COMMAND BUNKER* MAY WELL BE ABANDONED, BUT THE *DECEPTICONS* ARE PRONE TO BOOBY-TRAP THEIR CAST OFFS. PINT-SIZED AND ORGANIC YOU MAY BE...

...BUT THEY MAY HAVE SET *MOUSETRAPS!*

LOOK...

...WE *KNOW* OUR SNAP-HAPPY MYSTERY MAN GOT IN AND OUT OKAY. WE CAN, TOO.

BOTTOM LINE— IF WE WANT TO FIND OUT *WHY* THESE DECEPTICONS BROKE PROTOCOL AND SWITCHED HIDEY-HOLES...

"...WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO SEE THE *BIGGER* PICTURE."

JUST... BE *CAREFUL* IS ALL.

WE CAN'T RISK ANY KIND OF HOLOMATTER RECCE OR INVASIVE SCAN. YOU, WELL...

...YOU'RE GOING IN *BLIND.*"

I *HATE* THIS, *BUMBLEBEE.*

I KNOW, DOC, BUT PROWL WANTS HARD EVIDENCE, SOMETHING THAT WILL WARRANT A WHOLE *ALERT-STATUS* UPGRADE.

HARSH AS IT SOUNDS—AND BALANCED AGAINST WHAT ELSE WE *KNOW* COULD BE HAPPENING RIGHT NOW—THESE THREE, ULTIMATELY...

...ARE *ACCEPTABLE* LOSSES.

OKAY. EQUIPMENT CHECK—FLARES.

CHECK.

SCANNERS.

CHECK.

COMM PATCHES.

CHECK.

HEH. RIGHT. LOOK—THIS PLACE IS PROBABLY HUGE. WE'LL COVER A LOT MORE GROUND IF WE SPLIT UP.

JUST POINT THE SCANNER AT ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING. RATCHET WILL ANALYZE THE DATA *LATER.*

WELL, STAY IN TOUCH. AND, ER...

"...GOOD LUCK."

DALLAS, TX:

EPSILON HOLDINGS, HOW MAY I DIRECT YOUR CALL?

MISTER DANTE WILL SEE YOU NOW.

AH, DRAKE. GLAD YOU COULD JOIN US AT SUCH SHORT NOTICE...

YOU KNOW MISS SVENSON...

...MISTER JOLLY.

AND, OF COURSE, WE'VE ASSEMBLED YOUR USUAL TEAM.

MISTER JOLLY...

THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR A MEASURED, CONTROLLED *APPROPRIATION* IS, IT APPEARS, CLOSING FAST.

KLIK

MATTERS HAVE GATHERED A MOMENTUM OF THEIR OWN MAKING...

...WHERE, YESTERDAY, A *TANK* OPENED FIRE ON THIS SMALL, SUBURBAN BUSINESS PARK IN RIVERSIDE, DESTROYING SEVERAL PREMISES. EYEWITNESSES...

KLIK

...A TRAILER PARK IN TUCSON, ARIZONA, INJURING TWO PEOPLE...

KLIK

THESE INCIDENTS LEAD US TO BELIEVE THE *VISITORS* ARE, AH, MOVING UP A GEAR IN TERMS OF THEIR LONG-TERM GOALS.

THE MACHINATION MUST THEREFORE ACCELERATE ITS OWN ACQUISITION STRATEGY ACCORDINGLY. THANKFULLY, DUE LARGELY TO THE EFFORTS OF *STOKER*, WE HAVE A SOLID *HOMING SIGNAL*. A SIGNPOST, IF YOU LIKE...

...FROM *BEYOND* THE GRAVE.

DECEPTICON COMMAND BUNKER:

THIS IS ROVING NEWSHOUND *VERITY CARLO*, REPORTING FROM SOMEWHERE DEEP UNDER "NOWHERE, NEBRASKA..."

>GRZK

VERITY? YOU SAY SOMETH NG?

NOPE. UH-UH. NOT ME. JUST...

KEFF— LOSER— HH!

...CLEAR NG MY THROAT!

>GRZK

UH, RIGHT. OKAY...

...HOLLER IF YOU NEED US.

JIMMY?

>GRZK

HERE.

>GRZK

ANYTHING?

HARD TO KNOW.

THIS STUFF COULD BE THE GIANT ROBOT EQUIVALENT OF *SNAPPY-MEAL* CARTONS FOR ALL I KNOW.

HOLD THE FRONT PAGE, GUYS... I *GOT* SOMETHING HERE.

>GRZ<

CAN YOU DESCRIBE IT?

IT'S, WELL... IT'S A BIG *TREE.* ALL METAL. TRUNK, BRANCHES... AND THINGS THAT LOOK LIKE, ER, SEED PODS.

>GRZ<

ANYTHING IN 'EM?

•REC

NUHH... NOT THAT I CAN SEE. BUT, WELL, I'D SAY THEY WERE USED AS STORAGE. I—

>GRZ<

WAIT! THIS ONE'S CLOSED. LOOKS LIKE *CONTENT* TO ME. HANG ON...

VER:TY—*WAIT!* RATCHET SAID NOT TO TOUCH ANYTHING.

OH, PUH-*LEASE.*

THE WHOLE *POINT* OF THIS EXERCISE WAS TO POKE OUR NOSES WHERE THEY DON'T BELONG. I—

AH.

GOT IT.

FWPSSH

>CRZK

VERITY?

YEAH, YEAH. HANG ON, I'M—

KH—

HG—

HN.

>CR3K

VERITY—WHAT'S HAPPENING?!

GRZK
VERITY?
GRZK
JIMMY... WHERE ARE YOU? SOMETHING'S HAPPENED TO VERITY, I'M—
D-DON'T.
STAY-STAY WHERE YOU ARE, *BOTH* OF YOU. I'M... FINE. JUST... STARTLED...
GRZK
BUT—
I SAID... I'M *FINE.* IT'S NOTHING.
GRZK
VERITY, IT'S JIMMY. LOOK... IF YOU WANT OUT, NO ONE WILL THINK ANY LESS OF YOU. ME, I'M SPOOKED LIKE SCOOBY, Y'KNOW. MAYBE...
NO.
I CAN *DO* THIS.

BORED NOW...

WHAT'S TAKING THEM SO *LONG*? ISOLATED THIS AREA MAY BE...

...BUT ALL OF A SUDDEN I'M FEELING MIGHTY *EXPOSED!*

GO!

KRA-KOOM-PA!!

WHAT NOW?

WE HAVE TO GET THEM *OUT*. MUCH AS IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE RESPONDING TO A TRIPPED ALARM, I *DON'T* THINK THAT'S THE CASE. *WE* WEREN'T THE PRIMARY TARGET OF THAT STRIKE...

...THE *BASE* WAS!

AUTOBOTS. WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE?

WHO CARES?

MM

GOOD POINT.

HUNTER, VERITY, JIMMY– ABORT!

WHOOM

WHOOM

>GRZL< SAY AGAIN?

GET OUT OF THERE– NOW!

>GRZL
MAKE FOR THE EXIT POINT. *ALL* OF YOU!

BUT—

>GRZL
NOW!

OKAY, OKAY. JIMMY, VERITY... YOU GET THAT?

GOT IT. ON MY WAY.

VERITY?

JUST *ONE* MORE BIT TO CHECK OUT... WON'T TAKE A MOMENT. I'LL SEE YOU TOPSIDE.

VERITY, DAMMIT... IT'S *ENOUGH.*

YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO *PROVE* HERE!

>GRZL
VERITY?

WHAT ARE THEY *DOING?*

WE'RE SITTING ON TOP OF ONE BIG *EXCAVATION.* ENOUGH SUSTAINED FIREPOWER...

.. AND THIS WHOLE AREA WILL JUST *CAVE IN ON ITSELF!*

VOP

WE'VE GOT TO-

BRUPUPUPUP

MOVE!

TISH TISH TISH

SCREEEE

51DW510

OKAY NOW I'M MAD.

VOP

FZAK

THINK YOU'RE *SO* CLEVER, DON'TCHA?

WELL...

...I'LL WAGER *MY* PROCESSOR SPEED AGAINST YOURS ANY DAY!

COME OUT..

. COME OUT...

...WHEREVER...

...YOU...

...AH!

VOP

FGH.

YEH.

BLITZWING. BLITZWING... WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT YOU?

TRIPLE-CHANGER—FAST, DURABLE, BUT JUST A TOUCH ON THE PARANOID SIDE. I'D BET, RIGHT NOW, EVERY SENSOR IS AT OPTIMUM SENSITIVITY, "EYES"...

...WIDE OPEN.

FAAASH!

EHH.

SKRRKTCH!!

G'WRR!

DOWN. BUT OUT?

I GOTTA BE SURE.

THIS IS THE BIT WHERE I WISH I HAD A REALLY BIG GU-

-NUUUGH!

BAROOM

LOCK...

...AND LOAD.

NEBRASKA.

YES. ESPECIALLY CYBERTRON.

"KNOW WHAT I SEE WHEN I LOOK AT YOU? I SEE A FRIGHTENED LITTLE GIRL..."

"...IN A WORLD OF HURT AND PAIN!"

TO BE CONTINUED.